



ESEA Information Update

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Topic: Paraprofessionals—Frequently Asked Questions

1) Who is a paraprofessional under ESEA?

The law defines a paraprofessional as an individual with instructional duties. Individuals who work solely in non-instructional roles, such as food service, cafeteria or playground supervision, personal care services, and non-instructional computer assistants, are not considered to be paraprofessionals for Title I purposes.

The act also specifies the duties of paraprofessionals. These duties may include:

- Providing one-on-one tutoring for students if tutoring is provided at a time when the student did not have access to a teacher;
- Assisting with classroom management;
- Providing assistance in a computer lab;
- Conducting parental involvement activities;
- Providing support in library or media centers;
- Acting as a translator; or
- Providing instructional services to a student.

Teacher assistants in Wisconsin perform most of these duties.

2) How are paraprofessionals impacted by the legislation?

New criteria have been implemented for paraprofessionals, and paraprofessionals in schools funded by Title I federal programs will have to meet higher standards. These standards include completion of two years of study at an institution of higher education; an associate (or higher) degree; or meeting a rigorous standard of quality and ability to demonstrate, through a formal assessment, knowledge of and ability to assist in reading, writing, and mathematics instruction. Newly employed paraprofessionals in Title I-funded programs must meet these criteria prior to employment. Paraprofessionals currently employed in Title I funded programs have until January 8, 2006 to complete the requirements. **This requirement does not apply to paraprofessionals who do not work in Title I schools or those who work in targeted assistance schools but are not paid from Title I funds.**

Also, all paraprofessionals in schools supported by Title I funds must have a high school diploma or its equivalent and provide instruction under the direct supervision of a teacher. The latter criteria have been in place for several years in Wisconsin school districts.

3) What are the requirements for newly employed paraprofessionals in schools with Title I funds?

New employment criteria apply to paraprofessionals in schools supported with federal money. Newly hired (hired after January 8, 2002) paraprofessionals working in a Title I schoolwide program or in a targeted assistance Title I program must have completed two years of higher education, have an associate degree, or have passed a formal assessment of skills prior to employment. Paraprofessionals working in a schoolwide program must meet these requirements regardless of the source of funds used to pay their salaries. For paraprofessionals in targeted assistance programs, only those paid with Title I funds must meet these new requirements.

4) Are the requirements the same for currently employed paraprofessionals in schools with Title I funding?

For paraprofessionals hired prior to January 8, 2002, the same criteria must be met as above. However, these paraprofessionals must meet the requirements by January 8, 2006.

5) What exactly is a Title I school?

A Title I school is one that receives special federal funds because a larger percentage of its students are from families with low incomes. Title I is the largest elementary and secondary education program in the federal education budget. Funding is provided for students in high-poverty schools to enhance instruction and services. Individual schools with poverty rates above 40 percent may use Title I funds along with other funds to operate a schoolwide program. Schools with poverty rates below 40 percent, or those not choosing to be declared schoolwide programs, are targeted assistance program schools.

6) How can a person know if they are employed in a Title I school?

The individual should contact the school principal or federal program manager in their local district/office, <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/schldist.html>

7) Are paraprofessionals employed in non-Title I funded schools affected by the law?

The requirements for two years of higher education, an associate degree, or successful completion of a formal assessment is not required for paraprofessionals in non-Title I schools under the ESEA No Child Left Behind Act. However, each local educational agency (LEA) that receives Title I funds must ensure that all paraprofessionals have a secondary high school diploma or its equivalent.

8) Can paraprofessionals work under the supervision of any teacher?

No. A paraprofessional must work under the direct supervision of a teacher who meets the definition of a highly qualified teacher. If the supervising teacher does not meet the criteria as a highly qualified teacher, the paraprofessional cannot work under his/her direction. More information on highly qualified teachers can be found on the DPI web site at <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/esea/index.html>

9) Are there any exceptions to the employment criteria for paraprofessionals?

Yes. The requirement for two years of higher education, an associate degree, or completion of a formal assessment does not apply to paraprofessionals involved only with translation or parental involvement activities. Paraprofessionals whose primary task is to act as a translator or whose duties consist solely of conducting parental involvement activities are excluded from the education and assessment requirements.

10) Do these employment requirements for paraprofessionals apply to Even Start or kindergarten paraprofessionals?

These requirements apply to programs supported in any part by Title I funds or located in schoolwide or targeted assistance schools.

11) Are paraprofessionals who assist students with disabilities required to meet these requirements?

If paraprofessionals who work with special education programs are employed in schoolwide Title I programs, they must meet the same requirements as those in schoolwide Title I programs.

12) What does the law mean by two years of higher education for paraprofessionals?

Two years of higher education equate to 48 semester hours of college, technical college, or community college coursework. This is based on a full-time student academic load of 12 hours per semester for four semesters.

13) What is meant by a “rigorous assessment” for paraprofessionals?

DPI developed assessment guidelines for Wisconsin paraprofessionals. This system consists of three options: test, interview, and document performance. A paraprofessional will be deemed highly qualified by meeting any two of the three options. The options assess one's knowledge of and ability to assist in instructing, reading, writing, and mathematics. The paraprofessional assessment guidelines are available on the DPI web site at <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/>.

14) If a currently employed paraprofessional has to meet the requirements by 2006, does time spent in training count as time on the job?

This is unclear. This is a Fair Labor Standards Act question that has not been resolved at the federal level at this time.

15) Can a paraprofessional substitute years of experience or staff development activities in lieu of education or degree requirements?

There is no indication in the federal law that experience can substitute for meeting other requirements and may be used as a component of the portfolio option of documented performance within the DPI Paraprofessional Assessment System.

16) Can an LEA require that the same qualifications for employment be extended to all paraprofessionals in the district?

That is a local decision. If the board wishes to adopt the same employment qualifications for all paraprofessionals, it has that option. If the new standard is applied to current employees, the change may be subject to the collective bargaining process.

17) Will additional funding be available to assist paraprofessionals in meeting the requirements for employment?

Title I-funded LEAs must use at least 5 percent of their Title I funds but not more than 10 percent of their funds in 2002-03 to ensure that all paraprofessionals and teachers become highly qualified. In subsequent years, at least 5 percent of the funds must be used to ensure that teachers become highly qualified. In other areas of the legislation, considerable flexibility is given to allow combination of Title I funds with others for staff

development purposes. Other programs, such as Title II, Part A funds, can be used for training teachers, principals, and paraprofessionals.

18) How will the employment of paraprofessionals be monitored?

In verifying compliance with the law, each LEA must require that the principal of each school operating a program with Title I funds attest in writing on an annual basis as to the school's compliance with the law.

19) What happens if a paraprofessional working in a Title I-funded program was hired after January 8, 2002, without meeting all the ESEA requirements?

This is not specifically addressed, but failure to meet the criteria of the legislation can result in the loss of Title I funds for a school. The law indicates that the new requirements are in place immediately and are to be applied.

20) Can a paraprofessional working in a Title I funded program and employed after January 8, 2002, be hired with the understanding they will meet the requirements before the start of the next year?

No. After January 8, 2002, paraprofessionals hired in schools impacted by this law must meet the ESEA requirements prior to being employed.

21) Will paraprofessionals receive higher salaries as a result of the higher qualifications?

This law does not speak to salaries. Salaries for employees are local responsibility.

22) What happens if a paraprofessional is unable to meet the ESEA requirements after four years?

A paraprofessional who fails to meet the ESEA requirements before January 8, 2006, would be unable to serve in either a targeted assistance school program or in a schoolwide program.

23) Is DPI developing professional growth standards for paraprofessionals?

We are working with WEAC, AWSA, technical colleges, and other states to develop standards. These standards provide a growth model for paraprofessionals and are beyond the requirements of the ESEA as a standard for further development. We will have all of our recommendations in place in the 2003-04 school year.

Paraprofessional Resources

New Requirements for Paraprofessionals (ESEA Information Update Bulletin No. 02.03)
http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/esea/bul_0203.html

Title I Paraprofessionals Draft Non-Regulatory Guidance from USED
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SASA/paraquidance.doc>

DPI's No Child Left Behind Web Page
<http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/esea/index.html>

Specific questions related to this bulletin should be directed to:

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